



TRUANCY PREVENTION IN ACTION

PLANNING, COLLABORATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR TRUANCY PROGRAMS



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*This project was supported by Award Number 2003JSFX0084 awarded by the Office of
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office Of Justice Programs. The opinions,
findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the
author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.*





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	1
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	6
Understanding the Need for Community Collaboration	7
Community Collaboration to Prevent Truancy	10
Strategies for Building Community Collaborations	13
Strategy 1: Mobilizing People and Organizations to Create Change	15
Strategy 2: Including Policymakers in the Discussion	18
Strategy 3: Creating a Mission Statement and Goals	20
Strategy 4: Conducting a Community Assessment	20
Strategy 5: Identifying Desired Outcomes and Strategies	23
Strategy 6: Ensuring Support and Resources	24
Strategy 7: Integrating and Coordinating Programs	26
Strategy 8: Establishing Communication and Awareness	27
Strategy 9: Monitoring and Evaluating Efforts	29
Analysis of Effective Collaboration Models	30
Successful Examples From Practice	34
References	50
About the Authors	53







ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet, one of four in a series addressing various aspects of truancy, was published by the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University with support from the South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Safe Schools and Youth Services Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention. Special thanks for the support and guidance provided by State Superintendent of Education Inez M. Tenenbaum and by Cleo Richardson, Deputy Superintendent, Division of District and Community Services, South Carolina Department of Education.

Members of the Truancy and Dropout Prevention Committee, coordinated by the Center for Truancy and Dropout Prevention, provided feedback during the development of the four publications. Special thanks to those members: Patricia Bradley and Michael Harris.

A special note of thanks is directed to two major organizations that have been leaders in researching and reporting about the children and truancy issues for more than a decade. They have contributed to discussions about the knowledge base regarding the truancy issue and these publications. Their senior staff co-authored two of these truancy publications. The organizations are:

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success. NCSE was established as a result of a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. NCSE promotes collaboration among courts, schools, and law enforcement to solve problems at the community level. Additional information is available on their Web site found at www.schoolengagement.org.

The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC), in collaboration with NCSE, is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of people, programs and organizations to achieve positive results for our most vulnerable families. CFFC works closely with partners to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of those working directly with families, children, youth, and communities. CFFC services include training and technical assistance, research and evaluation, strategic ventures,





and information resources. The CFFC Web site may be found at www.coloradofoundation.org.

Additional staff of the National Dropout Prevention Center contributed to the development of the publications. Specifically, we thank Marty Duckenfield for assisting in the editing and developing the overall structure of the series of publications related to truancy issues. A special note of appreciation is extended to Peg Chrestman and her excellent proofing skills with each of the publications.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the creative work of Rachel Mumford of Rachel Mumford Graphic Design, Clemson, South Carolina, for her excellent work in the formatting and design of the four publications.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has long been established that the issue of truancy cannot be solved at the school level alone. The notion of “requiring the whole village” is particularly applicable to effective strategies that help keep students in school. This truancy prevention publication provides a general background discussion on the issue of truancy but mainly centers on the nuts and bolts of developing and implementing an effective communitywide collaborative to address truancy.

The first section provides some understanding of the factors associated with truancy and the resulting high costs to society. It attempts to develop one’s understanding and need for community collaboration by asserting that no one agency can address the problem successfully. This section also includes a discussion on the importance of building strong social networks so that the entire community creates a sense of ownership and responsibility for the issues the community faces. It ends with a discussion of five types of collaborative relationships as identified by Anderson-Butcher and Ashton (2004).

The next chapters introduce and discuss nine strategies for building community collaborations. It includes a Logic Model to graphically display the flow of resources, activities, areas of responsibility, and expected outcomes, both short- and long-term.

The final major section provides an in-depth look at three programs in different areas of the United States that have proven to be effective.

Strategy 1 is “Mobilizing People and Organizations to Create Change.” Some of the topics discussed in this strategy include developing communitywide support, identifying stakeholder organizations and members, selecting a lead organization/coordinator/collaborative leader, and developing a plan of action.

Strategy 2 is “Including Policymakers in the Discussion.” This strategy emphasizes that collaboration requires an approach different from the day-to-day problem solving that tends to dominate the energy of leaders within a single organization.

Strategy 3 is “Creating a Mission Statement and Goals.” The goals of a collaborative should be directly related to the mission statement. They should be well-defined and clearly written.





Strategy 4 is “Conducting a Community Assessment.” It is important for a collaborative task force to accurately assess the local truancy problems and data collection processes in place, to identify community assets, to identify concerns of all stakeholders, and to identify opportunities.

Strategy 5 is “Identifying Desired Outcomes and Strategies.” The objectives of the collaborative should describe the desired outcomes that the partnership will work to achieve. Objectives should be based on research and best practice.

Strategy 6 is “Ensuring Support and Resources.” Public agencies that are the typical partners in a community collaboration experience yearly changes in funding. Therefore, funding from any one source is generally too unpredictable and insufficient to sustain a long-term, capacity-building community collaboration. The collaboration should select a motivated staff and identify staff members who support the mission and goals of the partnership and who reflect the diversity of the community. Training for all those who work with the collaborative—whether paid staff or volunteers—is essential.

Strategy 7 is “Integrating and Coordinating Programs.” Developing interagency links that effectively integrate and coordinate programs that provide services to children and their families is best achieved through service integration. Effective integrated services tend to be child centered, family focused, culturally sensitive, and community based.

Strategy 8 is “Establishing Communication and Awareness.” There are four levels of communication between an organization and a community, each appropriate in different circumstances: damage control, education, input/feedback, and collaboration. Public relations are an important part of ensuring the collaboration has a positive public image and that the larger community understands the collaborative’s mission and goals.

Strategy 9 is “Monitoring and Evaluating.” The collaborative must develop a plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its efforts from the very beginning. Baseline data should be collected as well as information collected at intervals on the outcomes established in the objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A successful collaborative process will contain the following elements (Lane & Dorfman, 1997):





- A complex partnership structure that includes multiple partners and many partner levels
- A fully integrated level of involvement and participation
- Shared resources and responsibility for accomplishing goals
- A strong emphasis on the community as change agent, with particular focus of the school as a main component, or asset
- A collaborative leader willing and capable of developing peer-based, active relationships among diverse stakeholders.

EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

Three programs are highlighted from across the nation that have proven to be exceptional collaborative models:

- School Attendance Initiative, Multnomah County, Portland, Oregon
- Youth Opportunities United, Corpus Christi, Texas
- Truancy Interdiction Program/Jacksonville United Against Truancy, Jacksonville, Florida



INTRODUCTION

In days gone by, a handshake between friends, neighbors, or partners ensured an agreement that was binding and not easily broken. In today's world it takes more than a handshake to ensure successful collaborations. There are many obstacles to overcome in order to garner and use the “social capital” within a community, particularly when it involves school-community collaborations—not the least of which is overcoming the fundamental problem of the erosion of trust between people that has resulted from years of adversarial relationships between schools, social service agencies, and families. This text does not have all the answers to the problems and obstacles that stand in the way of successful collaborations to address the issue of truancy. What it does provide, however, is a rudimentary guide to understanding the issues surrounding the problem of communities and schools joining forces, along with nine fundamental strategies for implementing successful school and community collaborations and three examples where these strategies have worked well.

This publication should be of use to several audiences: those who want to build political will to initiate a truancy reduction program, school and district-level administrators who lack an understanding of how to build a community coalition, state and local agency personnel who seek to work more closely with the schools and other community assets to address issues in the community, and local governing entities who help to provide and sustain the resources of the community. It provides a very good overview of the need for collaborative efforts to successfully address truancy, as well as proven guidelines for practitioners who seek to address the problem from any level of service within the community.





UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

THE HIGH COST OF TRUANCY

Why should communities be concerned with truancy? Isn't it a problem for the schools, or the juvenile authorities, or the courts? Not when we consider the costs to communities.

Recent literature on the number of truancy cases in juvenile court clearly demonstrates how important it is for schools and communities to collaborate in dealing with this issue. The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, reported that juvenile court cases for truancy increased by 85% from 1989 to 1998 (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). The research literature shows a link between community context and truancy and consistently reports double-digit absentee rates for urban inner-city schools. In low-income neighborhoods, youths are more likely to experience violence, encounter maltreatment, and attend poorly funded schools.

Communities are forced to deal with the negative consequences associated with truancy: drug and alcohol abuse, delinquent behavior, and dropping out of school (McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004). Students with the highest truancy rates have low academic achievement rates and high drop-out rates (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). School dropouts have significantly fewer job opportunities, make lower salaries, and are more frequently unemployed than youth who stay in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). The community is financially affected by truancy in a number of other ways: less educated workforce, business loss because of youth who hang out and/or shoplift during the day, higher daytime crime rates, and the cost of social services for children who are habitually truant. In addition, there is a significant loss of federal and state education funding for the schools because of decreased daily attendance (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Ultimately, communities are finding it easier and more cost effective to provide interventions for truancy when problems arise rather than to wait until the community's economic and social resources are drained (*Best Practices Number Eight*, n.d.). When families, schools, and community institutions (e.g., local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) collectively agree to address the problem, everyone benefits. Schools enjoy the informed support of families and community members; families





experience many opportunities to contribute to their children's education; and communities look forward to an educated, responsible workforce. Benefits accrue to the staff of schools and community agencies as well: They can observe boosts in morale, heightened engagement in their work, and a feeling that their work will net results.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TRUANCY

Truancy is typically symptomatic of broad underlying factors such as family problems, school environment, special education needs, economic status, and mental health problems, which frequently lead to dropping out of school. For example, truancy is more prevalent in schools with inconsistent enforcement of discipline and truancy policies, poor interaction between parents and school staff, unsupportive teachers, unchallenging classes, and low sensitivity to diversity issues (Teasley, 2004)

The literature on truancy separates the general causes of truancy into four categories (Baker et al., 2001):

1. *Family factors*—poverty, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, lack of parental guidance or supervision, lack of understanding of attendance laws
2. *School factors*—safety issues, school size, attitudes of teachers and school administrators, inconsistent procedures for dealing with absenteeism, inflexibility in addressing needs of diverse students
3. *Economic influences*—type of employment opportunities for parents, employed students, single parent homes, high mobility rates, lack of affordable transportation, and child care
4. *Student variables*—drug and alcohol abuse, lack of social competence, mental or physical health difficulties, poor academic performance

A fifth category, community context, must be considered since community factors significantly influence the above. School attendance is influenced by community issues such as socioeconomic levels, community cohesiveness, recreational facilities, delinquent peers, street gangs, and interracial tensions.

The problems associated with truancy begin to surface when children are young. Studies show that students who subsequently





dropped out had become disengaged from school at an early age and were often truant (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Truant youth are ideal targets for early interventions when such efforts are directed toward reducing the development of additional problems and consequent involvement in the juvenile justice system. The literature on truancy reports the effectiveness of a coordinated approach involving schools, law enforcement, parents, faith-based groups, businesses, and judicial, social service, community, and youth service agencies (*Best Practices Number Eight*, n.d.). The interconnections between the causes of truancy and the effects of truancy on the community make it imperative that the solutions for reducing truancy become a community effort. No one organization or agency has the access, resources, or expertise to address the problems in a comprehensive, effective way.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION TO PREVENT TRUANCY

BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS

A community has been defined as a group of people who reside in a common locality and share a set of common values. A strong community creates a sense of ownership and responsibility for the entire group. Collaboration means working together and sharing responsibility for results. It implies that no agency or professional can achieve success alone in addressing the multifaceted needs of students and their families that contribute to truancy. Collaboration is rooted in an understanding of the interdependence among children, youth, families, the schools, and the agencies that serve them (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004).

Developing community collaborations that are effective in addressing truancy problems requires building active social networks. Social networks are the interpersonal connections that people participate in as they carry out their daily activities. When social networks produce linkages, trust, and a collection of shared values, the goals of the community become more important than individual self-interest or gain. Active social networks encourage individuals and institutions to communicate with each other and to work together to solve community problems (Lane & Dorfman, 1997).

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Collaboration has been defined in many different ways, but at a minimum, the description should include a well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations that is beneficial to all and includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals. Additional components should include a jointly developed structure, with shared responsibility, mutual authority, accountability for the success or failure of the venture, and the sharing of resources and rewards (Nissen, 2001).

It is important to distinguish between relationships based on cooperation, coordination, and collaboration because the degree of involvement, responsibility, authority, and shared resources are different. *Cooperative relationships* are informal, information-sharing arrangements that exist without a commonly defined mission, structure, planning effort, or sharing of resources or authority. *Coordinated relationships* have a more formal structure





and compatible missions. There is some planning and division of roles, communication channels are established, resources are shared, but authority remains within the individual organizations. *Collaborative relationships* bring previously separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission, comprehensive planning, well-defined communication channels, resources pooled and jointly dispersed, and the authority to make decisions.

Collaborative relationships are the basis for community-based collaborative empowerment coalitions (Himmelman, 2001) and peer-based power structures (Lane & Dorfman, 1997). Both types of collaborative structures emerge from community efforts to achieve a common goal. They are highly participatory, democratic, and diverse. Such collaboratives are initiated by community-based groups and organized after extended discussions on how to harness community assets and resources to address problems. The success of community collaboratives depends on the belief that the greatest potential for effective and positive change comes from a collaborative process.

Collaborative Frameworks

The literature discusses five types of collaborative frameworks (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004).

Interorganizational collaborations have developed as a result of the need for closer communication and integration among the professionals who provide independent services and support. Teachers, social workers, school psychologists, administrators, nurses, and volunteers establish interdependent relationships to promote positive outcomes for students (Tourse & Sulick, 1999). For example, prereferral processes such as student support teams involve collaborative efforts in which a variety of professionals discuss ways to resolve students' problems before they develop into more severe ones.

Interagency collaborations develop when two or more independent organizations develop formal agreements for working together. For example, schools join with local private and nonprofit social service agencies to provide counseling, outreach, and support to students and their families.

Interprofessional collaborations address the related problems of children, youth, and families such as poverty, underemployment, truancy, drug abuse, mental health, and domestic violence. Teachers and professionals working with children and families collaborate and explore ways to provide wraparound services and supports.



Family-centered collaborations are those in which families are considered full-time partners with professionals in deciding what kind of services and supports are needed (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2000).

Community collaborations combine the strengths of the four models described above. All community stakeholders are involved in addressing the multiple problems that often result in students' truancy and dropping out of school. As *The Newsletter of the National Court Center* pointed out, "truancy is a school, family, community, and juvenile justice system problem. Therefore, all segments of the community need to be involved and work collaboratively together to have a positive effect on reducing truancy in a community (Mullins, 2004, p.1)." Community collaborations can help identify such issues as the extent of truancy problems in the community, the services available in the community to meet the needs of youth and their families, deficiencies or gaps in the services that exist, and possible solutions to reducing the problems of truancy (Mullins, 2004). An effective collaboration will involve all those community stakeholders committed to improving children's learning and development, those who will work together to coordinate the operations of all their agencies (Lawson & Barkdull, 2000).





STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

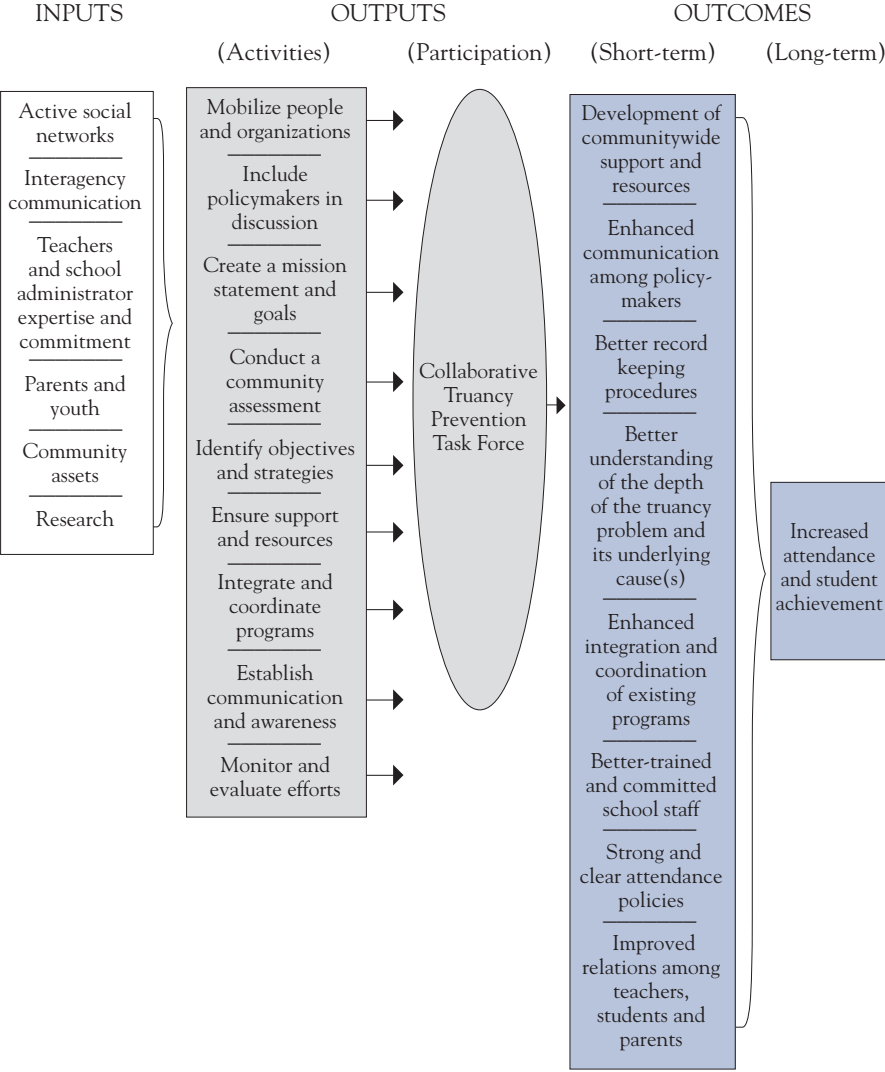
The strength of community collaboration lies in individuals and groups sharing information, planning, and working together to accomplish goals they could not achieve alone. The process of building community collaborations involves the following nine strategies:

1. Mobilizing people and organizations to create change
2. Including policymakers in the discussion
3. Creating a mission statement and goals
4. Conducting a community assessment
5. Identifying desired outcomes and strategies
6. Ensuring support and resources
7. Integrating and coordinating programs
8. Establishing communication and awareness
9. Monitoring and evaluating efforts

These strategies are embedded as activities within the *Community Collaboration Logic Model* (Figure 1) that is designed to graphically illustrate the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of a collaborative initiative to increase school attendance. In this case, the inputs represent the strengths and resources that are present within the school and community to support the collaborative initiative. The outputs include the nine strategies mentioned above as activities to be performed by the participants, who in this case are the Collaborative Truancy Prevention Task Force. The outcomes include short-term goals that help to ensure the initiative is making expected progress toward the long-term goal of increasing student attendance and achievement. The model takes into account several assumptions that will need to be in place if the collaborative initiative is to be successful. Likewise, external factors that are documented by research to have an effect on the successful attainment of the long-term goal are listed as variables to remain aware of as the strategies are implemented. Be aware that the model can be expanded to include any number of additional inputs, activities and subactivities, participants, and outcomes that may have an impact on the success of the communitywide collaborative effort.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION LOGIC MODEL



Assumptions:

1. Total commitment by all stakeholders
2. Data for decision making are valid and reliable
3. Resources will be available
4. Commitment by stakeholders will be long-term
5. Annual evaluation will guide strategies

External Factors:

1. Family factors
2. School factors
3. Economic influences
4. Student variables
5. Community context



STRATEGY 1: MOBILIZING PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS TO CREATE CHANGE

Develop Communitywide Support

First step is to develop communitywide support.

Ideally, one of the first steps in creating a community collaboration to address the basic causes of truancy is to develop communitywide support. Building such support begins with inviting as many representatives as possible—from community organizations and agencies, neighborhood groups, business associations, schools, local government, youth organizations, and faith-based groups—to join the collaborative. The next step is ensure that the collaboration is sensitive to racial, socioeconomic, and cultural differences and respects and seeks diversity in its membership. The third step is to communicate often and positively to the larger community and engage the community in a series of focused dialogues. Dialogues bring together diverse people and viewpoints; participants express their opinions and listen respectfully to others. These dialogues are designed to promote discussion, deliberation, inquiry, and the dissemination of knowledge. The process of engaging in dialogues leads people to develop relationships and a commitment to participate in a community collaborative (Lane & Dorfman, 1997).

Identify Stakeholder Organizations and Members

Who are the stakeholders?

Truancy is a school, family, community, and juvenile justice system problem. Therefore, all segments of the community must work collaboratively to have a positive effect on reducing truancy (Mullins, 2004). Stakeholders include everyone who is affected by or contributes to either the cause of, or the solution to, the truancy problem. A key concept of the Office of Juvenile

Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program is collaboration among community members. This produces a shared vision, maximizes existing resources, and results in an array of services to address issues related to truancy. Communities participating in this initiative are implementing a range of options that link truant youth with community-based services and programs ("Truancy Reduction: Keeping Youth," 2004).

John Gardner (1995) suggested identifying the stakeholders by determining who are the most influential citizens in every segment and at every level of the community: the neighborhoods, churches, civic organizations, minority groups, schools,





government, minority groups, professional groups, social agencies, etc. To determine how strong the social networks in the community are, ask the following questions: Do they know one another? Have they made a real effort to understand one another and work together? Do they meet regularly to discuss the future of the community?

An effective community collaborative should provide a comprehensive approach to improving youth and family functioning by combining techniques for dealing with family dysfunction, drug abuse, youth crime, mental and physical health, truancy, and academic failure. In order to provide such a comprehensive approach, an all-inclusive set of stakeholders should be invited to participate in the collaborative. Research demonstrates that people who are involved in making decisions that affect their lives are more likely to achieve success and contribute to the success of others (Blank & Melaville, 1993). A community collaborative should include the following:

- *Teachers, school administrators, and district office administrators.* Schools are the primary locus for attempts to serve families and encourage students to stay in school; attitudes of teachers and school administrators can help or discourage students; and district policies can either facilitate or hinder collaborative efforts.
- *Parents.* Research clearly shows that parent participation in the education of their children is a major factor in academic success; yet, too often, agencies ignore both the concerns of and assets possessed by families from different cultural, racial, or economic backgrounds.
- *Youth.* Students are probably the greatest source of information about their individual circumstances, school climate, family functioning, community culture, and the services they need.
- *Social service, health, and mental health agencies and professionals.* These agencies and professionals can provide information on the services available and the possibilities for collaboration, and can be involved in changing the ways public and private systems interact with other support networks in the community.
- *Juvenile justice and court personnel.* These personnel, including law enforcement officers, youth and family court staff, and youth advocates can provide invaluable insight into





the extent of the truancy problem, current laws and regulations, options and services that are already in place, and possibilities for collaborative solutions.

- *Faith-based groups.* The National Council of Churches have called upon local congregations to strengthen, support, and reform public schools through partnerships with local schools and monitoring reform efforts.
- *State and local governments.* State and local governments can review and amend regulations; provide access to parks, libraries, recreational facilities, and programs; and deploy resources to gain maximum advantage from state and federal funding sources.

Select a Lead Organization/Coordinator/ Collaborative Leader

A collaboration does not spring fully grown in a community. It usually takes root when a number of different groups in the community become aware of an urgent need for change, and someone or some organization has the vision to take action. Some group must take the lead in initiating the effort, contacting potential partners, organizing the initial meetings, and spearheading the development of a memorandum of understanding among the collaboration members (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004). Once the collaboration begins to form, the form of leadership becomes crucial. The literature on community collaborations stresses the importance of a peer-based power structure, one that is highly participatory, democratic, and diverse (Lane & Dorfman, 1997).

Someone has to take on the roles and tasks of leadership for the collaborative to succeed. A community collaboration needs a leader who understands and is committed to the collaborative process, who can facilitate interaction, inspire commitment and action, acts as a peer problem solver, builds broad-based involvement, and sustains hope and participation (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). The leader must have the communication, conflict resolution, resource development, and administration skills and the vision to transform individual interests into a collective force that achieves targeted outcomes (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001).

In addition, participants in a collaborative need leadership training and professional development to acquire new skills in working together and taking on new roles and responsibilities.

Someone has to take on the roles and tasks of leadership for the collaborative to succeed.





Participants need to change the way they think, work, and act both independently and collectively. They need to understand the implications of changing from a fragmented categorical system to a comprehensive and integrated system. They need to learn to work with other agencies and to think of the needs of children, families, and schools comprehensively and holistically (Blank & Melaville, 1993).

Develop a Plan of Operation

If a collaborative is to survive, it must have the organizational capacity to engage members in tasks that achieve the collaboration's goals and produce the desired outcomes. In order to build this organizational capacity, community collaborations need formalized processes that clarify staff and member roles and responsibilities and provide clear guidelines for decision making, interagency agreements, resource allocation, reporting, and accountability. A formal plan helps create a stable, predictable organizational structure and operating procedures; reduces conflicts and competition, and promotes member satisfaction and commitment (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2001).

A large collaborative can form a smaller, representative policy group to propose actions and a number of subgroups to address specific topics. This provides greater opportunities for participation and enables partners with different strengths to contribute. In addition, smaller working groups allow people to get to know each other and develop trust and commitment (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

STRATEGY 2: INCLUDING POLICYMAKERS IN THE DISCUSSION

What does it take to create and sustain an efficient and effective collaboration that includes policymakers when the collaborative has many partners, different points of view, and a potentially controversial issue such as truancy? A flow chart and decision matrix are of little value. The connections between policymakers, agency and department heads, and local leaders are often muddled in a collaborative. Collaboration requires an approach different from the day-to-day problem solving that tends to dominate the energy of leaders within a single organization. Systems thinking must be employed and requires agencies to look beyond their own

Collaboration requires an approach different from the day-to-day problem solving that tends to dominate the energy of leaders within a single organization.





needs and consider the effects of their actions on other agencies. This is not an easy task, especially in a system where agencies have competing roles and missions, where politics may frustrate interagency cooperation, and where power is often defined by an agency's share of resources.

Confusion around enforcement and jurisdiction has contributed significantly to the absence of a coordinated effort to keep students in school. Questions abound. Is it the school's role to enforce truancy laws? Is it the local police's role? Is it the role of the parents? Is it the role of the family court? Is it the role of the greater community? Is it the role of the juvenile justice system? Likewise, who has jurisdiction in matters of truancy? If one or more of the policymakers or agency heads believes it isn't within their job description or jurisdiction to collaborate and aggressively address truancy, then collaborations fail and loopholes are soon found within the system for parents and students to exploit.

Policymakers must communicate among themselves and with others in order to develop common positions that address a common goal. This is especially true of the truancy issue. Laws and regulations pertaining to truancy have typically been broadly written and open to significant debate about who is actually a truant, as well as the penalties imposed for truancy. Therefore, there is a need for policymakers to clarify the interpretation of the legal statutes so that all those who are working on the issue will be working from the same page in an effort to develop effective intervention strategies.

Indeed, the problem of truancy has proven to be so pervasive that it requires the coordination of several state and local agencies collaborating with personnel, resources, and procedures to address it effectively. The coordinated efforts of the police, family, school system, court system, and other local agencies are needed to arrive at a structured system of interventions for students not attending school. Each of these agencies is driven by policy and procedures designed to ensure its success and survival. Therefore, the leaders and policymakers within potentially competing agencies must shift their paradigm regarding the process of cooperation and collaboration. In spite of the challenges created by multiple partners and the processes of shared decision making, research suggests that collaboration is worth the investment (*What Does It Take to Make Collaboration Work*, 2004).





STRATEGY 3: CREATING A MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS

The *mission statement* of the collaborative guides the activities of the collaborative: the goals, objectives, and strategies. Once a group has been established that is working collaboratively, the members should brainstorm ideas about the mission of their collaboration—focusing on potential and discussing what *could be* rather than what is. An effective mission statement has the following characteristics:

- Is a positive statement written in the present tense
- Describes proactive efforts rather than reactive efforts
- Focuses on anticipated benefits and accomplishments
- Applies to all young people and families targeted for participation
- Reflects expectations of excellence
- Communicates a true democratic effort and spirit

The goals of a collaborative should be directly related to the mission statement. They should be well defined and clearly written. For example, there should be goals that spell out how the organizations will work together and define the responsibilities undertaken and resources provided by each. The goals should be realistic and attainable.

STRATEGY 4: CONDUCTING A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Truancy is symptomatic of broad underlying problems, and youth referred directly to the court system rarely receive the support or services they need (Baker et al., 2001). It is important to look closely at the extent of the truancy problem and to design programs that will address local needs. A community assessment is one way for community collaborations to gather information on the current conditions of children, families, agencies and organizations, schools, and the general community. It is essential to understand how the current system of rules and regulations works before attempting to change it. A community assessment might ask questions such as the following:

A community assessment is one way to learn about the condition of the community.





- Is there a process for identifying the underlying causes of a student's truancy?
- Are schools providing the types of referrals and interventions that students need?
- Are social service agencies involved in helping the family solve its problems and meet its needs?
- Do the schools provide additional academic assistance and opportunities to make up lost days?
- What is the procedure for dealing with students who have a large number of unexcused absences?
- How does the system address a student's failure to attend school?
- Are interventions required before truants are referred to the court system?

Community assessments focus on local assets, resources, and activities as well as gaps, barriers, and emerging needs. The information collected by the assessment should be guided by the collaboration's mission statement and goals. Each member of the partnership should be involved in collecting this information. This is a perfect opportunity for youth, parents, schools, faith-based organizations, juvenile justice personnel, and agency staff to participate in the collaborative. Most assessments begin by putting together and comparing information already available from various agencies. New information can be gathered through interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and public forums (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004). The information gathered should be organized in relation to the needs of students and their families. The collaboration should compare information on the same assets and issues collected from multiple sources. This will help the collaboration see patterns, trends, gaps in services, and disparities.

Assessing Local Truancy Problems

The collaboration can use some of the following methods to gather information on the extent of the truancy problem in its local community (*Keeping Kids in School*, 1998):

- Examine attendance records to determine if unexcused absences are excessive.
- Check the local police department's records for high rates of juvenile crime during school hours.





- Determine if the transportation situation in the community creates a problem for students getting to school.
- Consult teachers to see what is being done for students who miss school frequently and are behind in their schoolwork.
- Find out how truancy cases are handled in your community. Are there laws in place that may actually make the problem worse?
- Decide if after-school programs offer adequate support for student learning.
- Determine if recreational activities and sports are accessible and affordable for all children.
- Discover if truancy has increased over the past few years and what changes have occurred in the community that may have contributed to this change.

Identifying Assets

Every community, organization, family, and individual has assets. The key is to locate, develop, integrate, and enhance existing assets (Lane & Dorfman, 1997). Instead of focusing on what is wrong, identifying assets requires looking for what is going right and finding strengths and resources within the community. The process of identifying assets is often referred to as community mapping—a process that takes inventory of the specific skills, services, and capacities of the community's people (including the elderly, young, poor, non-English speaking, and homeless); informal community associations (including recreations, cultural, religious, athletic, and neighborhood groups); and formal institutions (schools, businesses, local government, libraries, hospitals, police and court system, and health and human service agencies). Mapping focuses on strengths and abilities as well as needs and services (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

Identifying Concerns

Concerns can be identified when the community mapping reveals duplication of services, gaps in services, or disparities between what students and families need and that which is provided. Asking the following questions can help uncover concerns (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).





- To what extent do the assets of individuals and agencies in the community match the interests, concerns, and needs of children and families?
- Are the resources and services available to families appropriate and of acceptable quality?
- Are services, resources, and programs accessible to families and children?
- Are the assets of families, informal associations, and community organizations being used to the best advantage for children and families?
- What do families want to see happen to improve their conditions?
- Does the collaboration need to revise or refocus its mission as a result of the community assessment?

Identifying Opportunities

Using the information gained from the community assessment and the analysis of the disparity between needs and services, the collaboration can gain a clear picture of how the community currently operates. It can define what new strategies are needed, define how these new strategies will differ from the existing system, and identify the strengths and untapped assets of the community. The collaborative has the opportunity to mobilize existing resources—human, in-kind, and financial—to develop new resources, and to develop the knowledge and skills families and practitioners need to contribute to the collaborative's mission (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

STRATEGY 5: IDENTIFYING DESIRED OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

The objectives of the collaboration should describe the desired outcomes that the partnership will work to achieve. An objective should be written as an outcome rather than an action for achieving the outcome (a strategy). Objectives should be based on research and best practice. A search of the literature or an Internet search will provide insight into what research has found and the experience of other groups. Objectives should be clearly stated in terms that define who or what is the target for





change, how the target will change, when the change will be achieved, and how the change will be measured.

Planning or selecting effective project strategies should involve carefully considering the intent of the objectives, reviewing required strategies and core services, reviewing related best practices and research, determining the personnel and resources needed, identifying the personnel and resources available, determining the amount of time both required and time available, and considering the appropriateness of potential strategies for your participants (e.g., age, gender, race, culture, etc.).

STRATEGY 6: ENSURING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Develop Resources

Public agencies that are the typical partners in a community collaboration experience yearly changes in funding. Therefore, funding from any one source is generally too unpredictable and insufficient to sustain a long-term, capacity-building community collaboration. The collaborative must look for a variety of funding sources: cash grants, commitment of staff time, and in-kind donations of facilities, equipment, supplies, and services. The programs that are most successful are those in which the partners commit resources. An effective approach is to invite potential funders to join the partnership. Many private sector organizations (e.g., local United Ways, Chambers of Commerce, and corporate philanthropies) contribute actively and creatively when they are part of the collaboration and have a voice in setting its goals. Potential sources of funding, in addition to the collaboration partners, include local, state, and federal government programs; private organizations and foundations; and local businesses and industry (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

Deriving funding from multiple sources creates special accounting and reporting issues that require considerable staff time. The partnership must usually provide a separate accounting to each funding source. It often needs to reapply for funding at regular intervals and may need to work creatively to combine specific categorical grants to support more comprehensive approaches. Usually, collaborations have a mix of short-term and long-term resources. These should be budgeted for different purposes. Short-term funding from grants, gifts, and corporate contributions cannot be used to support core program expenses such as salaries, utilities, and facilities; these expenses need to be derived from





stable, long-term funding sources. Short-term funding is best used for particular, one-time expenditures such as building a playground, providing professional development for staff, or purchasing special equipment (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

Select a Motivated Staff

It is essential that the collaboration identifies staff members who support the mission and goals of the partnership and who reflect the diversity of the community. An effective approach to securing such staff members begins with filling paid positions with those who volunteer from partner organizations, rather than having staff assigned from member programs. Using volunteers, interns, and trainees to support program staff can broaden community support for the collaboration. In addition, it is a good way to identify and recruit future competent paid staff. In order to facilitate recruitment, training, and support of volunteers, however, it is important to assign a paid staff member to serve as a volunteer coordinator.

In hiring staff, the collaboration should look for individuals with the following characteristics (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004).

- Resides in the community and has experience working with community residents and organizations and is familiar with the languages and cultures of the community
- Worked with more than one agency
- Adapts to new situations and is flexible
- Has a record of being accountable
- Seeks creative solutions
- Has a sense of humor

Professional Development

Training for all those who work with the collaboration—whether paid staff or volunteers—is essential. Staff development should include sessions on the organizational structure, mission, goals, and objectives of the collaboration; integration of services among member organizations; working effectively with each other, in groups, and with members of the community; fiscal and reporting procedures; and building collaborative leadership (*Putting the Pieces Together*, 2004). All staff members need skills in working in a multiethnic setting.





STRATEGY 7: INTEGRATING AND COORDINATING PROGRAMS

Collaborations must develop multiple strategies that include developing a new set of principles on which publicly-funded service systems operate and promoting changes in the manner in which these systems interact (*Improving Results for Children*, n.d.). Multiple strategies require developing interagency links to provide a broad spectrum of services to address the problems of truancy and its underlying causes.

Developing interagency links that effectively integrate and coordinate programs that provide services to children and their families is best achieved through *service integration*. The National Center for Service Integration defines this as a process by which a range of educational, health, and social services are delivered in a coordinated way to improve outcomes for individuals and families. Effective service integration emphasizes comprehensive services, family and individual outcomes, early intervention and prevention, provider accountability, and consumer- and family-oriented responses. Effective integrated services tend to be child centered, family focused, culturally sensitive, and community based (Overview, 2004).

The steps to successful service delivery include the following (Overview, 2004):

1. Encourage multiagency collaboration in the provision of services
2. Co-locate programs from different agencies
3. Develop common intake forms
4. Partner with the community
5. Ensure access to services
6. Enhance customer service and satisfaction
7. Share data and information across agencies
8. Identify opportunities for leveraging and matching funds among departments, agencies, and community partners

For such a process to work effectively, however, agencies must first learn what services other agencies in the community provide, how they operate, what mandates govern them, and what restrictions they are under. There must be open channels of





communication that permit a free flow of information within the system and cross-agency professional development.

One of the benefits of service integration is that services offered to children and families by community agencies and organizations will be more targeted and comprehensive. Developing intake forms that are the same in every agency allows for entry into the system at multiple locations. This process reduces duplication of effort while at the same time ensures that all students and families are served appropriately.

When a community collaborative decides to integrate agency services, however, policymakers need to understand the implications of shifting from the present fragmented categorical system to a comprehensive and integrated approach. It is important that the collaborative's organizational structure is supported and sanctioned at the federal, state, and local levels. Administrators must expand their roles to work with other systems to develop a comprehensive approach that meets the needs of families and children (*Improving Results for Children*, n.d.).

STRATEGY 8: ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS

Identify Levels of Communication

There are four levels of communication between an organization and a community, each appropriate in different circumstances: damage control, education, input/feedback, and collaboration. The basic level, *damage control*, is often necessary when critical errors are made or accidents occur. *Education* is used to inform the community about mission, vision, services, and other aspects of the organization. Education efforts are usually distributed through public relations efforts in the media. Often organizations seek *input/feedback* from the community. They may want feedback on their performance or seek input on how to improve services or use resources more effectively. The decision on what actions to take still resides within the organization. At the level of *collaboration*, information is not only shared and collected, but decisions and responsibilities are also shared (*Coming Together*, 2003). Participation in a collaborative requires high levels of communication.

Develop Regular Methods of Communication

The first step in ensuring communication both within the collaborative and with the wider community is to develop a basic





communications plan. Such a plan should consider the following (McNamara, 1999):

- What key messages do you want to convey?
- To what groups do you want to convey these messages?
- What is the best approach to reach each group?
- How will you know if you are reaching these groups?

Within the collaborative, there are certain basics to ensure a high level of communication. Every member should receive copies of the collaborative's strategic plan including mission, goals, objectives, and strategies. Regular meetings should be held to report on activities, seek feedback, discuss concerns, assign responsibilities, and make future plans. Major accomplishments should be celebrated (McNamara, 1999).

The way meetings are conducted facilitates communication. An agenda developed with key participants is an essential. Always have someone recording the minutes. Decide what outcomes you want to accomplish during the meeting and what activities need to occur to achieve those outcomes. Next to each major topic on the agenda include the type of outcome expected (decision, responsibility assigned to someone, etc.). Review the agenda so everyone understands the proposed major topics. Be responsive to additions or changes in the agenda. Always start the meeting on time—this communicates the importance of having everyone there from the beginning. Make sure participants accept responsibility for focusing on the issues, staying on track, and avoiding time-consuming repetitive discussion. At the end of the meeting, actions and assignments should be reviewed and a time set for the next meeting. Every member should receive a copy of the minutes of the meeting including any decisions made, responsibilities assigned, and the date of the next meeting (McNamara, 1999). In addition, representatives of organizations and agencies should be responsible for sharing information about the collaborative's activities with both their organizations' staff members and clients.

Enlist Media Cooperation

Public relations are an important part of ensuring the collaboration has a positive public image and that the larger community understands the collaborative's mission and goals. There are a number of ways of enlisting the cooperation of the media and ensuring that the message of the collaborative is communicated





to the community. Publicity is when the collaborative is mentioned in the newspapers, on the radio, or on television. A good way to encourage beneficial publicity is to invite local media to cover special events, to write press releases about the collaborative's activities, and to submit press releases about how the collaborative is serving the community. Advertising brings the collaborative's activities and services to the attention of the community. This can be done with brochures, signs, direct mailings, e-mail messages, newsletters, or public service announcements in the newspapers, on the radio, or on television. A community collaborative can also set up a Web site that provides information on its mission, goals, services, and contact persons (McNamara, 1999).

STRATEGY 9: MONITORING AND EVALUATING EFFORTS

Improving results for students, families, schools, and communities must be the ultimate goal of the collaboration. In order to ensure that its activities are achieving the desired ends, the collaboration must develop a plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its efforts from the very beginning. Baseline data should be collected. That is, data should be collected that shows the degree of truancy, community activity, school programs, student achievement, juvenile justice involvement, and court actions before the collaboration's efforts began. Information should be collected to support evaluation of the processes. Was everyone doing what they were

The collaboration must develop a plan for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its efforts.

responsible for doing in the way the collaboration envisioned? Did agencies integrate their services? Have policies been adjusted to promote attendance? Have schools adapted their practices to encourage students to attend? In addition, information should be collected at intervals on the outcomes established in the objectives. Are parents/caregivers benefiting from the services or training they receive? Are revised policies promoting attendance? Are students reducing their absences from school?





ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION MODELS

ADVANTAGES

Recent studies have noted a number of benefits resulting from community collaborations (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004):

- A broader range of intervention and prevention activities are available that have a direct impact on learning.
- Services are streamlined and duplication is reduced.
- Parents and families feel empowered to help themselves and others in meeting their needs.
- Parents gain parenting and work-related skills and experiences.
- Teachers and school personnel feel supported and know where to go and who to talk to when students need help.
- Agencies, professionals, families, and communities are more accountable for outcomes and adapting their efforts to improve those outcomes.
- Collaborations have resulted in an increase in academic achievement and attendance and decreased levels of misconduct among students, enhanced communication among providers, and enhanced family-centered practice within agencies.
- Initiatives that focus on family-centered collaboration have positively affected test scores, attendance rates, and the number of school suspensions.
- Community collaborations connected with schools have fostered improvements in attendance, overall experiences of parents, teachers, and students, and the quality of learning experiences for students.

ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF

In general, community collaborations are faced with policy and systems constraints, categorical service mandates, turf issues, expediency concerns, maintenance of agency and institutional involvement, securing resources, and facing time pressures





(Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Collaboratives face obstacles in making changes in power relationships among large funding organizations, schools, agencies, and other community partners. These power relationships determine how effectively the collaboratives can act on their priorities and gain access to necessary resources.

While a collaborative may claim to use strategies guided by a common purpose and by sharing risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards, it is too often embedded within and reinforced by existing power relations. The nature of most of the organizations and agencies that participate in collaboratives is usually hierarchical—where those in authority instruct and direct subordinates and where there are established rules and procedures that are difficult to change. Unless power relations within the collaborative are transformed, the agenda is usually guided and controlled by the lead organization, staff members' time is usually donated by the institutional members, and decisions and resource allocation are not significantly shared with community representatives (Himmelman, 2001).

Partners in collaborations that are effective in achieving their goals must demonstrate a willingness to increase each other's capacity and share risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards. Unfortunately, most support the existing power relationships and make no demands on funding or governmental institutions to change. In effect, large public, private, and nonprofit institutions that are working with or funding the collaborations seldom engage in internal changes that would either significantly increase the level of support for their community-based collaboration or reduce the bureaucratic aggravation. This results in the collaboration serving communities with a "do-more-for-less" mentality rather than providing the collaboration with the level of funding, support, and cooperation required to deliver the necessary services (Himmelman, 2001).

School and community relationships are not easy to build and maintain. Community partners may find the school bureaucracy aggravating while the community partner's lack of knowledge of procedure can frustrate school personnel. Educators sometimes feel that community members do not appreciate the complex and difficult task of improving student achievement. In addition, control of resources can be a problem. Educators tend to see school buildings, materials, and resources as belonging to the schools while community partners view these resources as community

*Control of
resources can be
a problem.*





assets and want a voice in their use. When these issues are not addressed, community partners often find themselves with no influence, while educators struggle for reform by themselves (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a variety of models that attempt to empower communities, build community ownership, increase engagement, and develop social capital through a collaboration. A successful collaborative process will contain the following elements (Lane & Dorfman, 1997):

- A complex partnership structure that includes multiple partners and many partner levels
- A fully integrated level of involvement and participation
- Shared resources and responsibility for accomplishing goals
- A strong emphasis on the community as change agent, with particular focus of the school as a main component, or asset
- A collaborative leader willing and capable of developing peer-based, active relationships among diverse stakeholders

Truancy intervention programs that work use multiple approaches involving the school, community, and the courts. The following approaches have solid research evidence for their effectiveness (Gerrard, Burhans, & Fair, 2003):

- Providing students with strong, positive relationships with teachers and other adults at school, including mentors
- Creating meaningful incentives for parental responsibility and including parents in all truancy prevention activities
- Strong and clear attendance policies
- Family counseling that builds on family's own strengths and resources
- Intensive school interventions including individualized plans, team approaches, a controlled environment that emphasized academics and discipline, and efforts by teachers to provide learning activities relevant to the cultural background of the students





- Establishing ongoing truancy programs for schools
- Training and supporting committed school staff who provide high quality, responsive services
- Including rigorous evaluation to measure the impact of the services

In order for communities and schools to mobilize their shared experiences and resources to address the problems of truancy, the following “rules of engagement” should be followed (Jehl et al., 2001):

- **Find out** about each other’s strengths and needs, clarify differences in perceptions and concerns, and set a common agenda.
- **Reach out** to potential partners on their own turf. School staff can identify interested community groups and inform them about the needs and circumstances of the school while community members can join with the school to provide concrete help.
- **Work out** difficulties as they arise, stay involved, remain flexible, emphasize clear communication, and change strategies when necessary.



SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE

History

The Multnomah County School Attendance Initiative (SAI), Portland, Oregon, began in 1996 with a small pilot project operating in two school clusters. The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and the U.S. Department of Education provided funding for the project. Between 1996 and 1998, the project provided services to 759 students from 32 schools. The project's success in helping students improve their attendance provided the impetus in Multnomah County to establish a countywide truancy initiative beginning in the fall of 1998.

Now in its sixth year, the School Attendance Initiative provides services designed to improve the attendance of students referred to the program. Within a few months of its inception in 1998, SAI was serving 130 schools. The SAI is one part of a larger service delivery system called the School Age Policy Framework created to provide services to families and children in Multnomah County who have few other resources. The framework merges key services so that families can easily access the help they need, including school-based extended-day activities; family engagement; Parents Organizing for School Success; and individual, family, and group support.

Unfortunately, budget cuts during Years 3 and 4 of the program triggered a decrease in staff and services and resulted in a reduction of the number of referrals from 5,422 in Year 3 (2001) to 2,374 in Year 4 (2002). As a result of budget reduction, services to ninth graders and their families were cut, and services to many schools were dropped. The following criteria were used to decide which schools would be offered service:

- Schools were chosen that put attendance data online into the student information database on a weekly basis.
- Priority was given to schools in the same feeder relationship.
- Schools were chosen that were identified by the Oregon Department of Education as needing more attention or were designated as “crisis schools.”





- Preference was given to schools with a low average daily attendance.
- Preference was given to schools that had their own intervention procedures.
- Preference was given to schools that had fewer services available at the schools and were relatively poor in resources for students and their families.
- SAI was only willing to work with schools that welcomed their services and that were committed to addressing attendance issues.

The Collaboration

The initiative is a collaborative partnership between the Multnomah County Office of School and Community Partnerships, Portland Public Schools, Multnomah Education Service District, East Multnomah County Independent School Districts, Multnomah County-supported Youth and Family Service Centers, Volunteers of America, and the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice.

Program Principles

The strength of the initiative is drawn from the following set of guiding principles:

- *Collaboration.* Mid-level managers have worked together to overcome institutional barriers and facilitate connections among diverse staff.
- *Strength-Based Philosophy.* SAI staff are trained and committed to working with families from a strength-based perspective. They help a family identify its strengths and supplement those strengths with services rather than concentrating on the family's deficits.
- *Early Intervention.* One of the goals of SAI is the early identification of students who are missing school. Early identification allows staff to target students before their attendance problems become compounded.
- *Service Redundancy Reduction.* Knowing which services are available in the community allows staff to coordinate those services, reduce unnecessary duplication, and fill in any gaps where necessary.





How the Process Works

The focus of the School Attendance Initiative is early identification of attendance problems before they escalate into more serious ones. The primary intervention strategy consists of identifying K–8 students with attendance barriers and providing outreach to those youth and their families. SAI staff members help families identify strengths and supplement those strengths with services that provide support for families' efforts to improve their children's attendance. High school students who are targeted for services through the School Age Policy Framework are also referred to SAI.

SAI has documented four main barriers affecting attendance: (1) students' educational needs, (2) students' behavior, (3) parents' lack of fundamental parenting skills, and (4) health issues. An educational need can be anything that the school is not providing—students may need a special assessment, an Individualized Education Plan, or tutoring. Students' behavior refers to such things as running away, disruptive classroom behavior, and antisocial actions. Lack of parenting skills may include poor discipline, little supervision, and inability to get children to go to school. Health issues include chronic conditions such as asthma and mental health problems, as well as problems resulting from poverty: transportation, housing, and basic needs. In addition, cultural issues arise frequently, such as the need for translation or other culturally specific services.

Referral Process: Each week the school receives a printout of all students who have missed three or more days of school in the previous week. Principals select students from this list for a referral to the SAI program. Upon referral, the principal sends a letter home, notifying the family of the referral to SAI. Once a student has been referred to SAI, his or her attendance is monitored for the remainder of the school year. If a student's attendance slips in any school year following the year of their initial referral, the school can refer that student again to SAI. Thus, students with complex attendance problems will likely be referred to the program more than once.

Outreach: Once the referral has been made, SAI outreach staff members make a home visit or telephone the home to find out the reasons for nonattendance and offer services and referrals to other programs to help families address barriers to attendance. For example, if transportation to school is a problem, the SAI staff try to procure a bus pass or alternative means of transportation. If the student doesn't have appropriate clothing to attend





school, the staff will find clothes. Students and families are often referred to the county Family Center that provides counseling, housing, and drug and alcohol services. Because SAI recognizes that families have multiple needs and issues, the staff provides a diverse array of services to help families and students. They include tutoring, mentoring, medical assessment, and parent education on issues such as negotiating with immigration and social service agencies. In order to help students return to school, SAI staff can also purchase materials such as alarm clocks, clothing, bus tickets, and lice combs.

Case Management Services: Case management services were initially included in the SAI intervention in order to help families address multiple, intense, and interconnected problems. The number of students qualifying for SAI case management services was higher than expected and represented a large proportion of the SAI budget. Since a substantial proportion of the qualifying families were already involved with case management services from other sources, it was questioned whether these families needed another case manager. In addition, SAI outreach workers served initially in assessing the families' needs and identifying the services needed. Given the budget reductions, it was decided to cut the case management component from the program.

Other Services: SAI also provides extended learning, recreational programs, and support programs to students during summer and interim breaks. These programs are run by committed staff members and are especially valuable for children who are making a transition between schools.

Evaluation Report

The evaluation report for Year 4 of the initiative highlighted the following:

- Over 13,000 students were referred to SAI over the past four years.
- Twenty-five percent of those referrals were students in kindergarten and first grade, reinforcing the need to have attendance intervention services for the very early grades.
- The percentage of Hispanic students referred to SAI continued to rise, and 14% of those students needed the assistance of a culturally specific service provider.
- Students and their families fell into two general groups: (1) the majority (55%) were relatively easy to reach and





needed few contacts to set them back on course, and (2) approximately 20% of students and families were difficult to reach and were overwhelmed by complex problems arising from poverty, crime, and addiction.

- Elementary students had both higher pre-referral (71%) and post-SAI contact (82%) attendance rates compared to middle school students (pre-referral, 68%; post-contact, 78%).
- Students seen by SAI staff continued to make gains in attendance. Prior to contact, only 3.4% of referred students were attending school 90% of the time; after contact, over 30% of the students were attending school 90% of the time.

The report concluded that, given the effects of budget cuts and program changes over the years, “it is phenomenal that SAI continues to produce significant improvement in attendance for referred students” (Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, 2003, p.35). The report also credits the staff of the program with being committed to serving students and families, being flexible, and believing in the importance of school attendance and the identification of family strengths.

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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES UNITED

History

Corpus Christi and Nueces County, Texas, have a long history of citizen involvement in community issues. The city of Corpus Christi has a population of about 290,000 individuals and, as early as 1993, began collecting data on issues affecting families. High dropout rates, a growing Hispanic population, increasing drug arrests of children 10 to 14 years of age, escalating family violence, and more families living in poverty suggested the community needed to concentrate on the problems overwhelming its youth. In 1997, the community joined together as Youth Opportunities United (YOU) to tackle the adverse conditions that youth in the community were facing.





Through an intense study of youth and family issues and how their needs were being addressed, YOU partners were able to develop workable strategies that concentrated on positive outcomes. Published in 1999, the YOU Comprehensive Strategy 5-20 Year Plan outlined goals and set timelines for effective change: in programs, in coordination of services, and in the future of the community. An integrated cluster of four risk factor sets was identified as the *Priority Risk Factors* for the community. The priority risk factors contribute to five problem behaviors: delinquency, violence, drug use, teen pregnancy, and dropping out.

Priority Risk Factors

- **Family Management Problems and Conflict.** The community had higher rates of child abuse victimization, domestic violence, and divorce as compared to the state average.
- **Economic Deprivation.** Per capital personal income in 1996 was estimated at \$19,885, which was \$5,000 less than the national per capita income. Also, the unemployment rate for the county was significantly higher than the state average.
- **Early Academic Failure and Lack of Commitment to School.** Youth in the local school systems were not engaged in education as evidenced by lower Texas Assessment of Academic Success scores, lower proportions of students scoring above criteria on SAT and ACT tests, and lower average daily attendance rates for major local school districts as compared to the state average.
- **Early Initiation of the Problem Behavior.** Higher rates of delinquency for youth 10 to 14 years of age, increasing drug arrests for this age group, frequent higher dropout rates, and higher teen pregnancy rates were all indicators of problem behavior for the community's youth.

The Collaboration

The Youth Opportunities United partnership owes its success to the dedication of many people and organizations including elected officials and community leaders from Nueces County, the City of Corpus Christi, United Way of the Coastal Bend, the Kenedy Foundation, the Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, and Work-Force 1. In addition, leaders from school districts and higher education, health and social services, business and professional organizations, area military units, religious organizations,





and representatives from parent and youth groups continue to collaborate to implement, sustain, and endorse the comprehensive strategy concepts.

Corpus Christi and Nueces County YOU participants have maintained a high level of commitment to the principles of collaboration. The collaborative's greatest strength is its capacity for building consensus and solving problems. The impetus has been the commitment to provide young people, both today and in the future, services that are effective and efficient—quality services that are data-driven, research-based and outcome-focused. Work groups were established to develop guidelines, to provide research and report on data, to secure resources, to create decision-making systems and linkages, to work with legislative/policy-making bodies, and to engage in outreach/communication. The groups collected data for the development of the Comprehensive Strategy Plan and subsequently met as needed to monitor and evaluate plan recommendations, provide a forum for resolution of issues and barriers, and provide reports to the Steering Committee. The YOU Steering Committee, which was designated to oversee implementation of the Comprehensive Strategy Plan, was comprised of work group co-chairs and key leaders from county, city, service, business, and funding sectors.

It was decided in the beginning to concentrate on building true community collaboration, dependent on local service commitment and in-kind support. The successful implementation of the YOU Initiative has depended on the community as a whole participating in not only the data gathering but also in the development of the services that would provide resources to all young people in need. YOU has taken significant steps toward achieving the vision that was set before the community.

Program Principles

The partnership joined forces in the development and implementation of the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Comprehensive Strategy Planning Initiative, known as the Youth Opportunities United Initiative. The mission of Youth Opportunities United is to have a community committed philosophically and financially to the well-being, education, and success of children. Government, schools, businesses, faith-based organizations, and individuals work together, interacting and sharing ideas and concerns to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Everyone is an active participant in promoting a safer and healthier community. The needs of children, youth, and families must be met today in order to have a safe and productive community in the future.





Project identification and implementation is accomplished by consensus. Even in its earliest stages, members of the YOU Steering Committee determined that prevention efforts would focus on interventions that:

- Address identified risk factors to which most children in the community might be exposed
- Focus on young people exposed to multiple risk factors
- Address risk and protective factors early in life of young people
- Address multiple risk factors in multiple domains
- Create a continuum of prevention and intervention services
- Reach and communicate effectively with all young people and their families
- Identify long-term efforts
- Involve a service delivery system that is unified in its vision of risk-focused prevention

How the Process Works

The YOU Comprehensive Strategy Plan focuses attention on target collaboration pilot projects, each of which addresses the four priority risk factors and fills gaps in services identified by the Work Groups. These projects provide an opportunity to provide protective factors through strategies that are data driven, research based, and outcome focused. The following collaborative initiatives have been implemented:

- YOU After-School Initiative; Success by 6; and Programs for Pregnant Women, Infants, and Toddlers
- Juvenile Assessment Center
- Safe Communities
- YOU Comprehensive Strategy Data Collection Project
- Mentor Network
- YOU Faith-Based and Business Community Project
- Early Headstart Program
- 21st Century Grant





- TAMU-CC Family Life Center
- Workforce Development Work-Force 1

In addition, there are after-school programs and public-private partnerships that benefit youth; local leaders giving young people a voice and a role in the community; and unprecedented collaboration among youth service providers and governmental agencies.

Juvenile Assessment Center

An important factor in the reduction of truancy and crime in the Corpus Christi region has been the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC). In 1999, the Juvenile Assessment Center of the City of Corpus Christi Park & Recreation Department was established to decrease juvenile crime in Corpus Christi by providing assessment and case management services to juveniles at risk of delinquency and to their families. Strong partnerships with community and social service agencies allow the intake specialists and case managers of the Juvenile Assessment Center to implement interventions that are individualized to meet each family's needs. By regularly partnering with over 30 direct service providers across the Coastal Bend, as well as numerous schools and some out-of-area agencies, the Juvenile Assessment Center can make sure that families have access to the services that are right for them.

The center serves as a temporary holding facility for juveniles arrested by law enforcement for violations of the daytime or nighttime curfews or for truancy. While held at the center, juveniles participate in an intake and assessment process and are given information about services in the community that can help them with their needs. Juveniles are released to their parents, who are expected to participate in the assessment process and who also receive referrals to community services. Juveniles at risk of delinquency and their families are offered three months of free and comprehensive case management services to assist them with their problems, and sometimes are ordered into case management as a condition of deferred adjudication or of probation by the Juvenile Municipal Court. If a family is participating in case management, a case manager from the Juvenile Assessment Center will meet regularly with the family to plan problem-solving strategies and to monitor the family's progress. Case managers help families connect with and follow through with needed services in the community. At the end of three months, the juvenile's family and a case manager from the Juvenile Assess-





ment Center decide if their case can be successfully closed or if there is a need for case management services to continue.

During the Juvenile Assessment Center's first year of operation, it became evident that few of the families whose children were assessed as most at risk for delinquency were willing to voluntarily participate in case management. The Juvenile Assessment Center entered into a partnership with the Corpus Christi Municipal Court and several Nueces County Justices of the Peace to correct this problem. The Municipal Court set up an entire Municipal Juvenile Court housed next door to the Juvenile Assessment Center with a full-time judge to hear *only juvenile cases*. Municipal Court Judges and Justices of the Peace began ordering truants and curfew violators into case management at the Juvenile Assessment Center as their sentence or as a condition of deferred adjudication. It quickly became evident that this was a valuable partnership; it could make sure that at-risk juveniles would receive needed services and the courts could monitor compliance with judicial orders.

Evaluation Report

The data collection and analysis conducted by the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has demonstrated that delinquency, juvenile violence, dropping out, and teen pregnancy have all declined since the beginning of the YOU initiative in 1998.

The Juvenile Assessment Center processed 1,338 intakes during FY 2004, which accounted for a total of 1,142 actual children when adjusted for repeaters. A summary of the types of offenses committed by these 1,142 children prior to their contact with the Juvenile Assessment Center follows:

Very delinquent with violent offenses:	62
Very delinquent with nonviolent offenses:	208
Status offenders:	110
No priors:	762

The above chart illustrates that the majority (872) of children being brought to the Juvenile Assessment Center are those who are still status offenders or who are committing their first offense. These are the youth for which delinquent behavior can be prevented with proper intervention. The 270 other children brought to the center had already begun to engage in highly delinquent



behaviors and required intensive interventions to break the cycle of delinquency and prevent further crimes. The outcomes of the program include the following:

- 1,142 children (1,338 intakes) were processed through the Juvenile Assessment Center during the part of FY 2004 that coincided with the 2003-2004 school year. Of those children, 928 were returned to school after their violation.
- The school attendance of these children following JAC intervention equaled a sum (for area public school children only) of 56,036 ADA-eligible days, saving Corpus Christi and Robstown school districts approximately \$1,681,080.00 in ADA funding.
- The Juvenile Assessment Center processed only 66 repeaters out of the 1,338 intakes (1,142 children) processed during FY 2004. This is a JAC recidivism rate of 5.7%, down from the JAC recidivism rate of 8.1% in FY 2003.
- Of the 1,142 children processed through the Juvenile Assessment Center, 982 committed no additional offenses of any kind (including truancy), however minor, after JAC intervention.
- Of the 1,142 children processed through the Juvenile Assessment Center, 1,073 committed *no delinquent offenses* after JAC intervention. This means that JAC was successful in preventing delinquency over 93% of the time.

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TRUANCY INTERDICTION PROGRAM/ JACKSONVILLE UNITED AGAINST TRUANCY

History

In 1998, the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Weed and Seed, and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Office initiated the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program. The goal of the program is to encourage communities to develop comprehensive approaches to identifying and tracking truant youth and reducing truancy. A key concept in this initiative is collaboration among community members, which produces a shared vision, maximizes existing resources, and results in a blend of services to address the range of issues related to truancy. The Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program has been implemented in seven sites: Contra Costa County, California; Jacksonville, Florida; Honolulu, Hawaii; Yaphank, New York; Houston, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and Tacoma, Washington. The sites vary in size—serving anywhere from 30 to 1,500 youth—and are diverse in geographic location, ethnic and sociodemographic makeup, and community-based leadership ("Truancy Reduction: Keeping Youth," 2004).

The City of Jacksonville encompasses 841 square miles, has 163 schools, and serves 132,495 students. Building on a history of efforts to address juvenile delinquency in the city and surrounding region, the City of Jacksonville created and initiated a Juvenile Justice Comprehensive Strategy (JJCS). The community-based JJCS Board identified five risk factors leading to juvenile crime, and three of them—lack of commitment to school, academic failure, and family management problems—were closely tied to truant behavior. The JJCS Board recommended that a comprehensive truancy program and truancy center be established in Duval County as a key component of the Strategy.

The Collaboratives

A collaborative partnership was created to achieve the strategy's goal, resulting in the creation of the Truancy Interdiction Program (TIP). Administered through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Offender-Based Programs in the Jacksonville Department of Community Services, TIP works in partnership with the Duval County Public Schools, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the State Attorney's Office, and the Youth Crisis Center. During





the 1998-99 school year, the Truancy Interdiction Program began full implementation with one truancy center at Southside Middle School staffed by the City of Jacksonville's Department of Community Services. Since that time, the number of truancy centers has increased from one to three, and funding is being sought for a fourth center.

A second collaborative initiative, Jacksonville United Against Truancy (JUAT), was founded in 2000. It is a collaborative effort with members from the State Attorney's Office, Duval County Public Schools, the City of Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and the Youth Crisis Center. Other members include the Atlantic Beach Police Department, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs, Jacksonville Beach Police Department, Jacksonville Housing Authority, Lutheran Social Services, Neptune Beach Police Department, Northside Community Involvement, and St. Paul's Community Empowerment Center. Jacksonville United Against Truancy operates with existing staff and funding from the partner agencies and organizations and has also received financial support from corporate sponsors BellSouth and Burger King.

Program Principles

The Truancy Interdiction Program works to redirect truant students back to school and toward more productive behavior. The TIP staff takes a comprehensive approach, meeting with the child and the family to discuss the situation and counsel them, then providing resources and referrals to help deal with the root causes of problem behavior. TIP then follows up on the student's progress and provides further support as needed.

The mission of the Youth Crisis Center (YCC) is to keep families together by providing shelter care for troubled children and counseling for families in crisis. All of YCC's services are free and confidential.

The Truancy Arbitration Program (TAP) is a part of the Truancy Interdiction Program. The Goals of TAP include the following:

- Return program participants to school
- Reduce program participants' absences
- Increase program participants' grade point averages
- Decrease the dropout rate for the Fourth Judicial Circuit
- Reduce the number of participants' referrals to the juvenile justice system





- Hold parents accountable for their child's regular school attendance
- Increase the graduation rate for students in Duval County

Jacksonville United Against Truancy's main goal is public awareness of the issues related to truancy, the efforts being made to reduce truancy, and the legal consequences of continued truancy for both students and families.

How the Process Works

Truancy Interdiction Program

The State Attorney's office has worked very closely with the Duval County School Board, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and the City of Jacksonville to develop a comprehensive truancy initiative. In the spring of 1998, Jacksonville police officers began aggressively picking up truants off the streets and transporting them to designated attendance centers. Students transported to a school are turned over to a school official. When a truant is delivered to a school that he/she attends, the School Resource Officer notifies the truant's parents or legal guardian of the laws pertaining to truanies and advises them to contact the school's administration, requests that the parent(s) or legal guardian appear at the school to take custody of the truant, and documents the action taken on the truancy report.

Students taken to the truancy centers are interviewed by Law Enforcement Coordinators who contact the truant's parents or guardians. Parents are expected to pick up their children and return them to school. Both parents and students are educated on the importance of attending school as well as the social and legal consequences of staying out of school. Truancy center staff provide parents/guardians with required paperwork for readmission of the truant students to their assigned school. In appropriate cases, the truancy center staff may provide referrals to social services or extended counseling to help resolve underlying problems that contribute to truant behavior. TIP staff monitor the student's school attendance for 30 days after interdiction.

If a parent/guardian fails to report to the Truancy Center by close of business, staff members take the child to the Youth Crisis Center for safekeeping and further intervention until the parent/guardian takes custody. If the parent/guardian refuses to take custody or fails to appear, the matter is referred to the Florida Department of Children and Families for further action as considered appropriate.





Youth Crisis Center

The YCC provides short-term shelter care and counseling to more than 2,000 troubled children each year. These children (ages 10-17) are referred by law enforcement, other agencies, schools, and through YCC outreach. They are in need of services and temporary shelter because they have run away from home or have been thrown out of their home. Residential counselors work with these children and their families to stabilize the immediate crisis, provide a long-term family structure to handle future problems, and return the children to their homes.

Truancy Arbitration Program

Another aspect of Jacksonville's truancy reduction effort is the Truancy Arbitration Program, designed to hold parents accountable for the school attendance of their children. Florida legislation calls for an Attendance Intervention Team (AIT) at each school. The AIT meets with the parent or guardian when a student accumulates five unexcused absences within a month or 10 unexcused absences within a 90-day period. Hearings are scheduled for parents and children to attend. The AIT must develop an attendance intervention contract with the student and parent to correct the problem. Parents receive case management for approximately one school year. Interventions such as counseling and tutoring are arranged to resolve the truancy problem. If interventions and case management are unsuccessful, criminal prosecution of the parent may result, but only as a last resort.

Jacksonville United Against Truancy

Jacksonville United Against Truancy developed a public outreach campaign to inform students, parents, and the community at large about the serious consequences of excessive absenteeism from school. This included a series of public service announcements for local television that highlight the negative impact of truancy on children and parents, and the creation of a Web site (www.coj.net; keyword: Truancy). JUAT has created brochures that define truancy and provide families with information on where to go for help. These brochures are available in four languages (English, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, and Albanian) and have been distributed to all Duval County Public Schools. JUAT has also established the month of September as Truancy Awareness Month and annually sponsors community events to provide families with information on truancy and the importance of staying in school.





Evaluation Report

Consistently refining its procedures and exceeding its goals, TIP has improved school attendance, reduced truant recidivism, lowered daytime crime, and decreased the overall truancy rate in Duval County. The program has decreased truancy recidivism rates by 14.2% from 1999 (19.0%) to 2002 (4.8%). It has decreased the number of truants on the street wanted for crimes or probation violations by more than 50%, from 877 in 1999 to 415 in 2002. More than 30,000 truants have been picked up by police since the initiative began. During that time, the number of juveniles arrested for residential burglary in Jacksonville dropped by 47%. For the 2004/2005 school year, the program was one of three programs in the country to be selected as a potential national model program.

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